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THE KING'S CROSS

Meditations on the Seven Last Words

THE KING'S CROSS

MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN LAST WORDS

By Angus Dun
THE EPISCOPAL THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL
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39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
TORONTO, BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS
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These meditations on the Seven Words from the Cross were originally prepared as the addresses for the Three Hours' Service on Good Friday. They are now printed substantially in the form in which they were delivered.

THE KING'S CROSS

INTRODUCTORY

WE are a people more aware of what we have done than of what God has done for us. We are given to admiring our own works,—the works of our hands, that which our fingers have made. Among us the first question about a man tends to be, "What does he do?": and we often imply that at the Last Judgment the chief inquiry will be, "What has he produced?" Our religion consists largely in "making good." Our sense of dependence is at low ebb.

But there are times with us all when this cult of achievement leaves us unsatisfied. Those unmanageable mys-

teries, birth and love and death, break in upon us with the reminder that we are not masters here and that our own doings are but snatches of embroidery on the vast fabric of the "given." Or we simply grow weary of our own doings. The business of *making* good and *making* love becomes effortful. The fresh tide of our interest in the day's work ebbs. We become conscious of how much there is to finish and how little we ever finish. We grow ill-natured. Our love of life slackens. All around us are unfinishedness and complexity and problems.

At such times we desert the altars of achievement. We leave our work frankly unfinished and seek out those places where there is nothing to finish. We leave behind the things and relationships and people that demand to be "made good" and seek for those things

whose goodness is a free gift. The sea, clambering up the shore, does not ask to be finished. The deep shadowed hills ask nothing of us but that we should lift up our eyes to them. The charging brook makes no demands upon us. We go from the unfinished work of our own hands to the finished handiwork of God and, behold, it is very good.

We go from the world of demands and tasks, where it is hard to "make good" and hard to "make love" into the presence of that which it is hard not to love. We draw apart to the contemplation of those things which only ask of us that we love them and be thankful for them,—flowers and sunrise and stars. We separate ourselves for the time from the people we have to persuade to believe in us and in whom we have to persuade ourselves

to believe, our clients and customers and patients and students and superiors, and go apart with those familiar friends and kindred who by the mysterious grace of God seem to believe in us already and in whom we, for our part, can not help believing.

Under this treatment our good nature is somewhat restored. Something more like a right spirit is renewed within us. The love of life is regained.

To all these things, as far as they go, religion says a hearty Amen. "The Lord knoweth that ye have need of these things." They are to our faint-heartedness what bread is to hunger. But man shall not live by bread alone and man's spirit shall not be made whole by recreation alone.

It may seem strange to speak of Lent as a time for restoring our good nature and our love of life. It may

seem strange to speak of the contemplation of the Cross in the same breath with the contemplation of sunlit waters and shadowed hills. Lent often appears as something quite different from that,—as a time for being gloomy under religious auspices, a period when we are called upon to make ourselves a little wretched for piety's sake. And the yearly contemplation of the Cross must seem to many an artificial way of adding dark hours to years with darkness enough in them already.

If the restoration of spirit, the good nature, the love of life for which we seek is of the sort that is to be won by forgetting and overlooking the burden and pain of life, then holiday is no doubt the way to find it. But if we seek a good nature and a love of life that can suffer long and still be kind, that is not easily provoked, that bear-

eth all things, endureth all things and never faileth, then we need more than holiday. The man or woman who wants to be more than good-natured, who wants a really *good nature,* knows well enough that the cure for ill nature must go deeper than recreation. It must search out and cast out the selfishness and vanity and uncleannesss and indolence and spiritual fatigue that are at the roots of our ill nature. The love of our friends and our kindred is too blind a love, too tolerant of our weakness. And they ask too little of us. We must come into a presence that condemns all the evil in us without disheartening us. We must come into the presence of the Cross.

Likewise the man or woman in search of an unconquerable love of life, something more than a passing mood or a pagan love of pleasure,

knows well enough that it must be a love than can live with much else beside sunshine and laughter and those whom it is easy to love. We must be able to find God even in the midst of pain and evil. We must come into the presence of a work of God in which pain and sorrow and sin are taken up and transfigured, from which "sorrow and love flow mingled down." In the Cross we have such a work of God, something finished, something given, "towering o'er the wrecks of time."

The road to a *good nature* leads through the repentance of Ash Wednesday. And the road to an abiding love of life leads through the sorrow of Good Friday.

THE SUPERSCRIPTION

And they crucified him, . . . and sitting down, they watched him there: and set up over his head his accusation written, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.—S. MATTHEW xxvii, 35, 36, 37.

WE are met together to contemplate the Cross. We must begin by making certain that that is our single purpose. We are not met to contemplate our own piety or to compare it with the heedlessness of the multitudes who on this day pass by on the other side. We are not met to listen with approval or disapproval to the addresses of a minister. The subject of our contemplation is the Cross.

Before our imagination, cleansed and consecrated, we are to summon and hold the image of the Cross. But it is not on the crossed timbers, not

on the wood and iron, that we fix our gaze. It is on Christ lifted up. During the hours that we spend together He is before us with arms outstretched. He speaks. We listen. And the only thoughts that concern us are these: What is He to me and to my neighbors? What am I to Him?

Over the head of Christ crucified are written these words: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." They are the only title that is written into the scene. A passerby, stopping to gaze from afar off on this gruesome scene on Golgotha, would be given no other explanation than this. Three men crucified. In the centre a man who has been scourged. His brow marked with thorns. Soldiers at the foot of the Cross casting dice for His clothing. And over His head,—This is a King.

If the passing stranger, drawn by pity or by curiosity, drew near and questioned one of the Roman soldiers on guard at the place of execution, he might get some such answer as this, "Is He a King? Did He claim to be a King?"—"Yes, He set Himself up to be somewhat. Called Himself a King. Came parading into Jerusalem on the day following the last Sabbath, stirring up an uproar among the people. These fool Jews, always talking about the restoration of their little kingdom. Why aren't they content with the rule of Caesar, without talking about the Kingdom of God? They have law and order. What more do they want?" So little did the Roman soldiers know what they did.

If going on his way again, the stranger should meet one of the leaders of the Jews and question him, saying,

"Is He a King? Did He claim to be your King?", the scribe or Pharisee might answer,—"We had to put it that way to get action from the Romans. They care nothing for the law of God. All they care for is law and order. No, He didn't exactly claim to be a king. But He acted as though He thought He were one. He made Himself equal with the King of Kings, forgiving men's sins. 'Who can forgive sins, but God only?' When we questioned Him, He blasphemed, saying that the very Spirit of the Most High God spoke in Him. He broke the ancient laws of Moses, in obedience to which alone we can be saved. He set Himself up as the giver of a New Law. If He is what He claims to be and can save others, let Him save Himself and come down from the Cross." So little did the guardians of religion

and righteousness understand the treasure which they guarded.

On the outskirts of the city or hurrying along the road toward Galilee, the stranger who had passed by the Cross and seen the strange superscription, might meet one of the disciples of Him who was crucified. And still wondering over the mystery of that scene, he might ask again, "Was He a King? Did He claim to be a King?" And the disciple might answer, "I do not know. I do not understand. He told us that after the baptism of John He went out into the wilderness and wrestled with Satan. And Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, but He rejected them. He seemed not to be a King. He was poor. He had not a place to lay His head. Yet He spoke always of a

Kingdom. He told us the law of the Kingdom as one having authority in it. It was the Kingdom of God, yet it was also His, as though He were the very Son and Heir of God. He was to us a King. But one of us asked Him once whether we might have places of honor at His right hand and at His left in His Kingdom. And He said, 'Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' And then He called us together and said, 'Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosover will be great among you let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant; even as the Son of Man came not to

be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many.'"

It is a King that is lifted up on the Cross before us. It is not only a man in pain. It is not only a just man evil entreated. It is not only a prophet rejected of His own countrymen. It is a King. He does not invite our pity. He commands our obedience. We do not weep for Him. He weeps for us. We do not rush to His aid. We bow before Him. Who are we to help Him? In His weakness He strengthens us. His humiliation humbles us. Here is no victim of men or of circumstances. Here is the Master of life. The Cross is a throne.

But only those can recognize the King on the Cross who have renounced their worldliness and are ready to have their world and all their values turned upside down. To the wisdom

of this world, the Cross of Christ is foolishness. Until we can recognize the King on the Cross we have not known what is royal. It is the Christ who was crucified who sitteth crowned on the right hand of God.

OPEN our eyes, O God, that we may see that which is royal. Clothe us with the garments of humility, that we may enter into the presence of our humble King. Take from us our worldliness and our despising of the lowly, that being cleansed from all self-seeking, we may be admitted into the glorious fellowship of the servants of God.

THE FIRST WORD

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.—S. LUKE xxiii, 34.

THROUGHOUT His ministry Christ had been putting Himself on the side of the outcast and defeated. His love drew Him through city streets and along country roads, beside city gates and through dark doorways in search of trouble. Poverty, weakness, loneliness, thirst drew Him to their side. And wherever any were despised and rejected of men, there He was as their advocate. Since publicans and sinners were not respectable, He was a friend of publicans and sinners. Children are rebuked for their forwardness in the presence of the great Teacher; and in answer to those who

rebuke them, the Teacher reaches out His arms to draw them nearer. Zacchaeus is a covetous man, suspected and disliked in his community. Christ chooses to put up at his home. A woman is taken in adultery, and Christ finds her accusers gathered about her. "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone." And the only one who has no stone ready to cast is He who is without sin.

Now, He who was a friend of the outcast and defeated is Himself cast out and rejected of men. And a miracle takes place. His enemies thrust Him from them. He returns to their side. He takes their side. They treat Him as one defeated and outcast. He treats them as men themselves defeated and outcast. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He pleads their cause. He argues their

case. He is the only friend His enemies have.

We could understand Fear, crying out for mercy and for gentleness in the midst of pain. We could understand Anger, prophesying destruction to those who slew Him and calling upon God for vengeance. We could understand Pride, hiding the signs of fear and defeat beneath bravado. But can we understand the miracle of Forgiveness?

It is plain that His forgiveness does not mean either surrender or compromise. In the very act of praying for His enemies, He draws further from them and nearer to God. He is as far from them as compassion is from cruelty, or tenderness from the hardened heart, or love from hate. It had been so all through His life. He was further from covetousness than those who

despised Zacchaeus, He who forsook houses and lands and bade men take no thought for what they should eat or what they should put on. He was further from uncleanness than those who condemned the woman taken in adultery, He who taught that adultery may be committed in the heart, and set aside the law of Moses as to divorce. He cared more for the poor than those who upbraided the woman with the alabaster box. He hated cruelty and injustice more than His enemies hated Him. Because He judged as God judges, He judged His enemies more severely than they judged Him. But because He loved as God loves, He was the best friend His enemies had.

He alone saw how deep and black was the defeat of those who crucified Him, and He alone pleaded their cause and

sought for the mercy that alone could save them.

In Christ upon the Cross we see love for God and love for sinners dwelling in one heart. His love of God does not hold Him back from loving sinners. His love of sinners does not stand in the way of His love of God. God and sinners can meet in His heart. They are not, then, hopelessly separated. The life that can take two alienated lives within itself is a reconciling life. Christ's is a reconciling life.

The forgiveness of Christ came to men with such authority as being the forgiveness of God, because men recognized that He who loved them was the same One who judged them with the stern judgment of God. He did not depart from God in drawing near to them. Therefore they could come near to God in drawing near to Him.

The deepest agony in Christ's passion was the pain of giving such forgiveness. To love purity and love adulterers, to love kindness and love the unkind, to love generosity and love the covetous, to love God and love sinners, that is the inmost secret of Calvary.

That God forgives means that the Love of God reaches out after all of us, into all the dark places of our world and of our hearts, seeking to reconcile us to Himself and to one another, even while the aweful purity of His holiness must cast out and reject all the unkindness and uncleanness and selfishness that dwells in our lives.

It is the nature of the Love of God to reach down to us without lowering Himself to love the false and little and unclean things which we love. It is the life of God to remain perfect and

yet go into companionship with men.

In return, He asks of us a love like His own. He asks us to reach up to His perfection without ceasing to love those whom He loves, without despising ourselves or our neighbors. It is the life of man to remain in the companionship of men and go into the presence of God.

To love God is to let His love dwell in us, and when His love dwells in us, it will carry us past all the barriers we build against our fellows,—all barriers of race and breeding, all barriers of custom and disapproval,—until our lives are knit into theirs and we become their advocates before the throne of God.

The Cross is no arbitrary and passing incident in the history of man's redemption. It is not the price paid to a relentless God. It is the destiny of the

forgiving heart. And if we have not entered into it, it is because we have loved neither God nor man greatly.

"Father, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Even now as we know ourselves so far from the love of God and the love of our neighbors, Christ is at our side, pleading for us also, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

He forgives even our unforgivingness.

FORGIVE us our unforgivingness, O God. With lying lips we condemn the lies of our brethren. With unclean hearts we despise their uncleanness. With whatsoever judgment we judge,

Thou dost judge us. Departing from our brethren we depart from Thee. Bring us back to Thyself and to them, that sharing with them in Thy forgiveness we may share Thy forgivingness.

THE SECOND WORD

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.— S. LUKE xxiii, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43.

CHRIST had lived at the side of the wrong people and of the wronged people. And now He died at the side of the wrong people. It was not of His own choosing that it was so, but it was typical of His whole life. He had even taught with incredible emphasis

that God associates with the wrong people, is on the side of the wrong people. God does not dwell, He taught, with the securely pious, who in their rigorous conformity are thankful that they are not as most other men and women are. He dwells rather with the humble and despised publican, who out of the heart, not merely out of the Prayer Book, cries "God be merciful to me a sinner." They who feel sure that they are well will not be called upon by this Physician. He lived and died with the sick.

He who was on the side of God came to dwell on our side. He who dwelt with purity came to dwell at the side of the unclean. He who dwelt with perfect love came to the side of all uncharitableness. He who dwelt with perfect peace came to the side of rancour and self-seeking and petty

jealousy. He passed over the great gulf between holiness and sin, between God and us, not only to be near to men, but stranger still, to be near to God. For if there was anything He was sure of, it was that the Spirit of God and the spirits of men are so knit together that they must be sought and found together. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will God forgive your trespasses." "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me."

He came over to our side in order that we might be on His side. He came to be *with* us that we might be *with* Him.

There were two men beside Christ on the Cross. One of them turned and was *with* Him. The other was only *beside* Him. It is not the same to

be outwardly *beside* Him and to be inwardly *with* Him. To be numbered among those who keep His company, even to be named with His name, is not the same as to be *with* Him. He spoke often of those who were *against* Him and those who were *with* Him. "He that is not with me is against me." He knew that at least one of the twelve was not *with* Him. To the scribe who was not outwardly one of His followers and yet knew the great commandments to be the *great* commandments, He said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." And not to be far from the kingdom of God was not to be far from Him who was its cornerstone.

To be *with* Him is to see things as He sees them, to believe in what He believes in, to love what He loves and hate what He hates, to love Him. God

alone knows whether we who are gathered here and appear before the world as His disciples are really *with* Him. Do we see things as He sees them, life, God, ourselves, our neighbors? Do we love God? Do we love our neighbors as ourselves? Do we prize the knitting together of men and God above all else, so that we would not let anything else we treasure stand in the way of achieving that?

Do we believe in forgiveness? Really believe in it, for ourselves, our fellows, for servants and masters, for blacks and whites, for Germans and Russians? for wives and husbands? So few do believe in it. The forgiveness they believe in is a bargaining matter that proclaims to the enemy, "When you have begged my pardon and admitted that you were all wrong and I was all right, that in it all we

were very far apart, then I shall graciously relent." But that is not to be *with* Christ, who though we were so far from Him drew near to us and stood ready to receive, and was not fearful lest even He who was innocent should be numbered among the transgressors.

Do we believe that the greatest is the servant of all? Until we do, we shall not recognize Christ as the greatest of all. But so few do believe it. There are many called Public Servants, but there are few in spirit. There are many who measure greatness as the Gentiles did and call it Success. There are few who truly measure greatness as Christ measured it and so are *with* Him.

He came to be *with* us that we might be *with* Him. And yet He is so little a King of violence that He will not

lay hold of us and force us into His service. He will not be a slave-maker, but will only call us as free men into a service which is perfect freedom. He will only stand like the Father whom He honors, ready to welcome the sons of God into the family of God.

He is close at hand. He is ready to receive. But how can we pass over the gulf which we perceive between ourselves and Him? We may be *beside* Him, but we are not *with* Him. The thief on the Cross beside Him showed the way. The woman in search of healing showed the way. She touched the hem of His garment. The thief hardly did more. He reached out towards Him. He desired to be with Him. And that was enough to begin with. Just to admire Christ, just to touch in reverence and love the hem of His garment, is to begin to enter into

that place where He is. Where our treasure is, there shall our heart be also. We grow to be what we love. We grow like those whom we love. When the love of cleanness springs up, the cleansing has begun. When the love of kindness calls, charitableness has begun to enter in. When the love of truth appears, honesty is close at hand. When the love of Christ is in a heart, the kingdom of God is not far off.

To surrender to that love and to ask to abide in it, is to be converted. The thief on the cross was converted.

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. To be *with* Christ now is to be with Him always. And a new thought of Paradise is born. To be in Paradise is to be with Christ. He goes to prepare a place for us, that

where He is there His servant may be also.

To depart hence is to be with the Lord.

THOU dost suffer at our side and we rail at Thee, complaining of our lot. We are far from Thee though Thou dost come so near. Remember us in Thy dwelling place, O God, and bring us into that country wherein Thy will is done.

THE THIRD WORD

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.—S. JOHN xix, 26, 27.

IT was not the first time He had had to separate from His mother. It was only the last of many times. Out of the obscurity of His childhood there comes the story of His separating from her in that same city of Jerusalem. At that time when she had found Him, she asked Him, saying, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us: behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing? And He answered, How is it that ye sought me? Wist

ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And now, if she had had the heart, she might have asked Him again, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" And His answer again would have been, "Wist ye not, that I must be about my Father's business?"

In the early days of His ministry, those of His own household had come to Him to draw Him back from what seemed to their unseeing eyes a mad career. To speak plainly, they thought He was a fool.

On one occasion when His mother and brethren sought Him, it is recorded that He contrasted the wider loyalties to which He had been summoned with the family ties within which they would have held Him. 'Who is my mother and my brother?' He had learned in His own experience

the bitter lesson that "a prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among His own kin, and in his own house."

This last separation from His mother was but the end of the hard road which again and again had led Him to a painful break with all the ties of natural affection. That which He asked of His disciples was only the following where He had gone before. "Thinkest thou that I am come to send peace on earth? I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother, and a man's foes shall be of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."

Yet the Teacher from whose lips these hard sayings came cared more

for the family and did more for the family than any other. He reiterated the ancient commandments to honor thy father and mother, to reverence the lives whose bodies gave birth to our bodies and whose spirits shaped our spirits, and He rebuked those who would reduce by one jot or tittle the depth and breadth of those obligations. He lifted the union of man and woman in marriage out of sensuality and legal partnership to the level of a holy union, in which as in the kingdom of God, love alone is the fulfilling of the law. "What therefore God hath joined together let no man put asunder." He so joined His life to childhood that forever after the care and training of children is sanctified in His name.

And yet He broke with His own family and parted from His mother and His brethren to found a wider

kinship. "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

He parted from His mother and brethren to be near His Father. But the Father, because He is the Father of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, straightway sent Him out to bind together in a new kinship the children of God, become brothers and sisters in Christ.

And that which came forth from His sacrifice was the Church of Christ. It is not in its deepest meaning an organization for the maintenance of public worship. It is not in its deepest meaning an organization for the trans-

mission of privileged ecclesiastical authority. It is not in its deepest meaning a society with a vested monopoly of God's grace or God's truth. It is the household of God. It is the home of Christ's Spirit, where His Spirit lives. And the place where His Spirit does not live is not His Home no matter how many times His name is written on its walls. The Church is the fellowship of those who know themselves to be through Christ children of God and brothers and sisters of one another in Christ.

From the Cross, Christ said: "Woman, behold thy son." "Son, behold thy mother." And to us now from the Cross He says: "Brethren, behold thy brethren." "Sisters, behold thy sisters."

It is this which makes so tragic our failure to be His Church. The lack

of true fellowship among those who worship under one roof, the sectarian spirit, the assurance of being better in God's eyes than other branches of the Church, the coldness, the petty rivalries,—all these literally tear the life of Christ apart. He loves us all. He is in us all. He cares for nothing so supremely as that we in Him might be one.

"And now I am no more in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thy own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.—That they all may be one, that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

THE THIRD WORD

THOU hast set us among strangers, O God, and dost bid us dwell with aliens. Those of our own household know us only in part and love us only in part. Make us known to one another; reconcile us to one another, that we may dwell together in Thee.

THE FOURTH WORD

And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?—S. MARK xv, 33, 34.

A CHANGE now takes place in the centre of the thoughts suggested by the words from the Cross. The first three words have to do with those who are about the Cross. They show us Christ in His last earthly dealings with mankind,—with the enemies who crucified Him, with the thief on the Cross beside Him, with His mother and His disciple. They speak to us of ourselves and of His dealings with us.

THE FOURTH WORD

The words which follow centre in the dark experiences through which He was passing and in His relation to God. This fourth word, which we now recall, expresses the deep distress of spirit through which He was passing. It is a cry of disappointment, of sore amazement, of questioning and loneliness.

The ancient writers who gave us our accounts of the Lord's life must have been sorely tempted to omit these words from the record as unworthy of the majestic and victorious spirit of their Master. Yet it is better attested, perhaps more certain, than any of the other words from the Cross that have come down to us.

If these words stood alone in the record of His life, they would be dismaying and shattering words. If His life had been marked throughout by a

confidence of easy and certain victory, by the assurance that divine power would shield Him from all ill, and that the certain reward of perfect righteousness is prosperity and ease — as many of the Old Testament writers had asserted; if He had gone His way, always certain that God would not suffer His Holy One to so much as dash His foot against a stone; if that were the record, and then at the end we found this piercing cry of disillusionment and despair,—our confidence in Christ could hardly survive. But the record is not that.

All the signs of the times were ominous and foreboding. The followers of Herod and the Pharisees showed their hostility early in His ministry. According to the Gospel of John at least two attempts had been made upon His life. And quite apart from His

own experience, He knew that they had persecuted the prophets which were before Him. At the great scene at Caesarea Philippi when He asked His disciples whom they thought Him to be, and the confession came from the lips of Peter, "Thou art the Christ," He straightway began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and scribes and be killed. The Jerusalem towards which He had steadfastly set His face in these latter days was "Jerusalem that killeth the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee." The last days before the end were full of repeated anticipations. The woman with the alabaster box of precious spikenard had anointed His body for burial. The Supper with His disciples had been a gathering of sol-

emn farewell. The distress of Gethsemane was in preparation for the pain of Calvary. He had come to see that it was necessary that the Son of Man should be crucified.

This necessity did not lie only in the historical situation in which He found Himself. Nor did it lie in some arbitrary decree of an arbitrary and revengeful God. He might have turned back and have avoided the crucifixion. The necessity lay in the very nature of His ministry and high calling. If He was to maintain together both the unswerving righteousness of God and the everlasting love of God, there was no other way. To call for a purity that condemned their uncleanness, to proclaim an inward law that condemned their pretentious legality, to hold to an unworldliness that refused their worldly hopes, was bound to make both priests

and people His enemies. And to maintain an unfaltering love for those whom His teaching condemned, was to shut out all violence from His ministry. Whatever be our judgment as to the Lord's pacifism, it is plain that He set out to conquer by a new method and knew that no other method would gain the victory He sought. He could not flee from His captors without being disloyal to God's law. He could not draw the sword against His captors without proclaiming Himself their enemy. He could not even come down from the Cross by the violence of God. All external means must fail to accomplish His purpose, which was to win men to a free obedience to the perfect will of God. Whatever be our skill in softening Christ's teaching as applied to ourselves, He had to love His enemies, to bless them that cursed Him, to

do good to them that hated Him, to pray for them which despitefully used Him and persecuted Him. He had in one final and supreme act to maintain the full austerity of God's law and the full patience of God's love. And that meant the Cross.

The cry of distress from the Cross, —"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was not, then, a cry of disillusionment at fragile hopes rudely broken. It was the last and deepest cry of a spirit wracked and tortured by the mystery of spiritual evil.

Why are God and man so far apart? Why do men, beholding good, choose evil? Why do they stone their prophets and kill those whom God sends unto them? Why does even unfailing love fail? Why does He who would reconcile men to God have to go so far from God to be near to men,

and to suffer such pain of spirit and of body? Why does all creation groan and travail? It is the echo of God's, "Why do my people go far from me?" It is the gathering up of mankind's darkness and confusion of spirit, "Why is God so far from us?"

The Cross gives no neat answer. It shows the spirit of the Master Himself, staggering beneath the burden which He has long since faced and resolved to carry.

Men have found comfort in the very hardest interpretation of the words, as the cry of spiritual loneliness, when nothing seems real but one's own deserted spirit and a world of unresponsive things and men. He shared the forsakenness of our spiritual night. He is alone with those who are alone. And even though we descend into Hell, there He is also.

WHY hast Thou forsaken us, O God, and why have we forsaken Thee? Thou dost know the loneliness of being forsaken of us. Deepen our homesickness that we may seek Thee until we find Thee.

THE FIFTH WORD

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.—S. JOHN xix, 28.

IF the fourth word from the Cross stands for the distress of Christ's spirit, this fifth word, "I thirst," stands for the distress of His body.

We do not know whether there had been pain or physical suffering in His own life before this time. But we do know that this was not His first meeting with pain. He did not live in any realm apart. He was not shut within the walls of His own senses, nor guarded from the drabness and horror of human ills. Pain did not have to come knocking at the door of His own life to persuade Him of its presence in

the world. Before it had knocked, He had opened the door; and before it had come to His door, He had gone in search of it. He knew where pain was and He went to find it. And He found it, —sitting blind by the roadside, lying helpless by the pool, limping along the streets, in the home of a centurion, in the home of Mary and Martha, on the Cross beside Him.

His views as to the worth or goodness of life or as to the power and love of God, were not dependent on whether life treated Him well or treated Him ill. There was in Him none of that presumption, which seeing in oneself and one's own welfare the measure of all things, estimates God by one's own health and fortunes. Whatever men's judgment as to the faith which dwelt in Christ, it was not a faith built alone upon the contempla-

tion of the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air, on sunlit waters and playing children. He had seen that sparrows fall, that sheep stumble into pits; He had seen men in pain and women in sorrow; He had seen nakedness and thirst; He knew that towers fall on the just and on the unjust, and had discarded that easy omniscience that can see the exact justice in every visitation of trouble. He healed some who were sick. Others He could not heal. Multitudes, He knew, had never come, and would never come within His reach.

He so identified Himself with all the want and suffering which were about Him that He could say that in their hunger and nakedness and thirst He was hungry and naked and thirsty, and that to minister to those whom He loved was to minister to Him. So that,

ever since, there has come from many parched lips to those who have ears to hear His own, "I thirst."

Now, that which He had seen and felt and known in others has come to Him. It has come to Him in the sleepless night of expectation and resolve. It has come to Him in scourge and thorn and nail. It has come to Him in weakness and weariness and thirst. And He bears it as He had resolved to bear it, as a part of the burden of His Saviourhood. And the appearance of the Cross was changed.

It has been written that the Cross is common. It is Christ that is unique. There were three crosses on Calvary. There were many before and there have been many since. There was only one Cross of Christ.

It has been written, also, that the Cross of Christ is the truth about life.

"Life is as brutal as it is, as repulsive as it is, as unjust as it is,—and as perfectly beautiful as He is." He who has looked upon it can have no shallow optimism as to what life holds in store. He can have no easy formulas according to which good and evil are dealt out according to deserts. But from the Cross a light shines out of the midst of pain which transforms it, not a light that has never shone anywhere else, but that shines in its full brightness there. There Love and Faith have met with Pain and have not faltered.

Out of that Passion has issued a new calling,—not the sham calling of those who manufacture crosses to carry, that they may appear before themselves or men as imitators of Christ, but those who finding a Cross in their path, carry Love and Faith to meet it. We all know those who, following

Christ consciously or unconsciously, show forth in the midst of pain and weakness a tragic beauty that makes them light-bearers and strength-givers to their fellows.

Had Christ possessed the love of God and known no pain, we should have envied and despaired. Had pain driven the love of God from Christ's heart, we should have pitied and despaired. But Christ knew God and loved God. And pain was in His heart and in His body. Pain entered, but the love of God dwelt with it and the peace of God surrounded it.

We are strengthened to believe even where we cannot see.

O THOU who are thirsty in the thirstiness of our fellows

and naked in their nakedness, open our ears to Thy calling and our eyes to the world's needs. Unloose the bands of our covetousness, blot out our injustice, fill us with mercy that we may quench Thy thirst.

THE SIXTH WORD

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished.—S. JOHN xix, 30.

THE long hours of pain and spiritual conflict draw to a close. The tension relaxes. The will lets go its weary hold. "It is finished."

What was finished? The pain was over. The distress of cruel mocking had ceased. And the life work of which the Cross was the last harsh task was over.

The whole life had been intense with the constraint of a divine mission. He had pondered it in childhood. He had come up out of the waters of Jordan at the baptizing of John filled with a divine fire that drove him impetuously into the solitude of the wilderness.

There He had charted the roads that lay ahead and rejected all that did not lead to God and to the Cross. He had chosen disciples and hurried from village to village. The time was short. The world hung in the balance. There was in His ministry no impression of an aimless and amiable teacher of helpful religious wisdom wandering through the countryside. Through all His teaching and healing, there ran a note of doom, mingling strangely with the notes of quietness and confidence. He must hurry on even though people clamored and implored for healing. Those who shared His ministry must travel light and waste no time in the houses that would not receive them. He was God-driven. "I am come to send fire on the earth: . . . I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened, (how am I pressed)

till it be accomplished." He must work the work of God while it is day. His was a life that blazed with the fierceness and the tranquillity of a great flame from the time that He was called of God until "It is finished."

In all that He said and did there was not only this note of urgency, but also the note of finality. He spoke as one having authority. It was the voice of the eternal. This need not be said again. This need not be unsaid. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Here you have—not hypothesis, not rumor, not a passing fashion of thought, not opinion, but God's truth. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock" . . . God rules. And this is the law by which He rules. The

city in which God does not rule shall be destroyed even though it be the holy City of Jerusalem. The only city that can stand is the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. The house which is not built upon that law will fall stone from stone even though it be the temple. The life that is not founded upon this law is built upon sand.

What was the work which He had finished? To proclaim the rule of God. To proclaim the law of God's rule. To bring that rule to earth. He had proclaimed the Law and He had sealed the proclamation with His blood. He had prayed, "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth." And in Him the name had been hallowed, the will had been done, the rule of God had come. In Him

God was loved and men were loved. In Him man forgave men as God forgives men. And in the name of God He had paid the heavy cost of forgiveness.

Was His work finished? *His* work, Yes. *The* work, No! His work was finished. God could ask no more of Him. He had loved God with all His heart and mind and strength. He had offered Himself once for all to God as a holy, living, and acceptable sacrifice. There was nothing more to give. It was finished.

Was His work final? Yes, it was final. Was sin conquered? No! But He had done all that God can do to conquer sin. He had shown not only in word but in deed that God goes out forever from the threshold of Heaven to meet the returning prodigal, not seeking the restoration of His wasted

substance, but only the restoration of His son. He had shown that neither height nor depth nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The carpenter of Nazareth had done the handiwork of God. He had shaped the hard and stubborn wood of the Cross into the token of love and faith —to be worn upon the breasts of saints, to be traced on the foreheads of disciples, to be lifted aloft over city streets. A token disregarded, abused, mocked by the people who wear it, mocked by the heedless traffic in the streets below,—but finished. In Him God had once for all dwelt among us and we beheld His glory.

And in Him man had entered once into the Holy Place. Out of fire and struggle the mould of a new humanity had been wrought, and it was

final. It remained for those who came after to pour their lives into that mould.

The foundation was laid, "But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

FINISH Thy work in us, O God. Restore the worn and patched fabric of our lives. Take from us all that is not of Thy making, that being patterned after Thy likeness we be made a new creature in Thee.

THE SEVENTH WORD

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus he gave up the ghost.—S. LUKE xxiii, 46.

IT is an utterly Christlike ending. There was in the life of Christ the note of mastery and authority. There was as clearly the spirit of dependence and childlike trust. He summoned men into His service as one who has a rightful claim upon their service. He spoke words that should not pass away. He rebuked the leaders of His people and was entirely unimpressed by the power of Caesar. He spoke as one who would judge the world and whose judgment would be final. He rejected the feeble aid of Peter's sword in the confidence of spirtual legions at His beck and call. He commanded unclean

spirits and forgave unclean men. He accepted the loftiest titles which His disciples could conceive. And at the end, in childlike simplicity, this King and Master of life commends His spirit to His Father's care and keeping.

This simple trust is as characteristic of His life and teaching as all the utterances of mastery and authority. It is not a new posture of the spirit adopted in the face of death. It is the habit of a lifetime expressing itself without effort in the final act of His life. He had continually urged men not to be anxious for the morrow, but to go on into it in quietness and without fear, confident that in every undiscovered tomorrow there is promise for the soul that trusts God. Now at the evening of life He Himself is not anxious for the morrow. He had continually urged men not to take anxious

thought for their bodies, wherewithal they should be clothed, nor yet for their life. And now He takes no anxious thought for His Spirit, with what body it shall be clothed, assured that His Father knoweth what things He hath need of.

If He was confident throughout life of the mighty power of God that coursed through Him and of the exalted office to which God had called Him, He was conscious, too, of His entire dependence. He was meek and lowly in spirit. He possessed in His own heart the blessedness, which is the happiness, of the meek. He sought to drive fear from men's hearts along with sin. "Fear not" was often on His lips.

This which we call faith, in the sense of simple trust, is a distinctive mark of the goodness of Christ and of

the goodness we call Christian. Apart from the religion of Christ, men have found courage and temperance and honesty and unselfishness. But faith can only dwell with hope and love, hope in God and love for God. Faith lends to the pattern life of Christ and to the lives of all those who are conformed to His likeness a quality peculiarly Christian. Courage and honesty and unselfishness and justice take on a gentleness and humility and repose, which they can not have apart from it. Men can be courageous and honest and just and unselfish in a world wherein God is not found, believing that each of these is better than its opposite. But in the measure that men do not find Truth and Justice and Love at the heart of things and on the throne, their very virtue must take on a note of bitterness or resig-

nation, of bravado or of pride. Either man nourishes and treasures a goodness which he must at last resign to the tramplings of an indifferent fate, or he finds in His own moral achievement the only worshipful thing in life and grows proud even in his virtue. The same goodness that confesses that God alone is good commends itself to God's keeping. Faith lends to the character of Christ's disciple a beauty of its own, the beauty of God's peace.

We are surrounded by omnipotence, and the deepest question of life is whether we can trust omnipotence. Our reach is short. Our time is brief. Our labor is forever unfinished. Our hopes and loves and purposes reach out to distances we can not span and to years we can not attain unto. The arrow shot from the hand must at last be committed to the sustaining and

guidance of laws and forces beyond our power. Even when we have done our mightiest, when we have given all and our work is finished, our work and our own souls must be committed to the sustaining and guidance of laws and energies beyond our control.

Death is but the final committal. If we can not trust God for tomorrow, we cannot trust Him for the last to-morrow. If we cannot commit to Him our children and our fortunes and our unfinished work, we cannot commit to Him our souls. Those who have learned with Christ to rejoice in the sufficiency of each today, to walk through darkness confident of light, to wait patiently for peace in the midst of pain, to gain victory out of defeat, to turn the hard materials of life into shapes of beauty and of love, can with Him find in death the way to life.

THE SEVENTH WORD

St. Francis entered as few have into the mind of Christ. And St. Francis sang of Death:

"And thou, most kind and gentle Death,
Waiting to hush our latest breath.

Thou leadest home the child of God
And Christ our Lord the way hath trod."

O THOU whom eye has never seen nor ear heard, lead us through the darkness and silence of death into the brightness and rejoicing of Thy Presence.

CONCLUSION

". . . the shape of the Cross which rises vertically as high as God, and stretches right and left to the uttermost bounds of humanity."—BISHOP BRENT.

IN the form of the Cross we may see the pattern alike of His teaching and His life.

Thou shalt reach up to God. Thou shalt make common cause with God. Thou shalt make thyself one with God. Thou shalt identify thyself with God's justice, with God's truth, with God's purity, with God's mercy. Thou shalt be perfect as thy Father in heaven is perfect.

Thou shalt reach out to thy neighbor. Thou shalt make common cause with thy neighbor. Thou shalt identify thyself with thy neighbor, with his interests, his affections, his fail-

ures, his pains. Thou shalt make his thine own.

These commandments are the central structure of His teaching. They give to His teaching its shape and contour. They are at the same time the design upon which His life was built. Out along these two lines His will, His affections, His mind moved ceaselessly. With perfect simplicity He reached up to God. He pierced through and broke down all barriers that might oppose, ancient half truths as to the nature of God and the way to God, the jealous opposition of those who were the custodians of the established way, the downward pull of physical necessity and physical desire, the distracting attractions of dominance over men and things, the fears and darkness and impurity that hide God from men. He broke through

them all and walked in the presence of God, found Himself led by the hand of God, and with sure confidence thought the thoughts of God and spoke the Word of God to men.

No less did His life reach out to men. And again, He broke through all barriers. He was not held back by the forbidding uncleanness of disease or the forbidding rudeness of manners. Sin could not drive Him back, sin self-indulgent and convivial, sin unclean and degrading, sin rich and hated of men. There was no threshold He would not cross. There was no life He did not desire to enter into and receive into His own.

Out of the structure of His life there issued the crucifixion. It was along the two great lines on which His life reached out that He met the opposition which finally killed Him.

His enemies were outraged by the presumption of His absolute reach to God, His casting aside of whatever in law or ritual He did not find confirmed, the sure confidence with which He spoke the will and the forgiveness of God. Shall man born of a woman lay claim to the throne of God? Shall man make himself equal with God?

They were scandalized by the irregularity and anarchy of His free charity towards men. "This law-breaker compromises with uncleanness in permitting a woman that is a sinner to minister to Him. He compromises with covetousness by dining with Zacchaeus. He breaks the Law to heal a wretched beggar. For the sake of one soul shall we endanger the ancient structure of the Law in which we guard for ourselves the knowledge of God we possess? Are not the great

institutions like the Sabbath of more worth than a single soul or a multitude of souls? This lover of men gives comfort to the enemy, even to the enemies of God."

If His physical crucifixion issued from the structure of His life, even more certainly did the inner crucifixion of His spirit. To reach out and to reach up together was to take to Himself the whole burden of sin. As in the Cross itself—the wider the reach the greater the weight and strain on the central shaft, and the stronger the upward thrust the greater the pull on the outstretched arms—so in the life of Christ. In the absoluteness of His reach lay His inner suffering. He had to condemn those He loved and love those He condemned. He had to lift those who were a heavy burden and reach out to those who were very

far off. In drawing near to God, He was tempted to draw apart from men and seek the peace of God in isolation. In His companionship with men, He was tempted to draw away from God and seek the favor of men in mere sociability.

But He held faithfully to both and so became the great Reconciler. There is nothing in heaven or in earth that can reconcile save love. Physical force can constrain two bodies within the same room. The paying of money can settle a legal claim. The undergoing of punishment can satisfy the law. But nothing can bring alienated spirits together except love. Christ reconciles by the power of love. He reconciles by holding us all in His heart and drawing us all to Him. No matter how far He must descend to find us or our neighbors, He brings the love of God with Him.

And whenever we draw near to Him, we find our neighbors and our enemies already in His heart. We cannot meet Him without meeting them. The Cross is the hurt of that reconciliation.

For those who see in Christ the revelation of the substance, the stuff of God, the Cross is the revelation of the structure of the life of God. God reaches down without limit. God reaches out without limit. Because the substance of God is love.

For those who see in Christ the fulfilment of human destiny, the Cross is the structure of the life to which we are called. Man's life is to reach up without limit. Man's life is to reach out without limit. We are called into the fellowship of His sufferings.

CONCLUSION

AND God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

END

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